

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1 1. A vending machine, comprising:
 - 2 a housing for storing products to be dispensed;
 - 3 a product dispensing assembly comprising a dispenser for holding and dispensing
 - 4 products,
 - 5 wherein the dispenser has an open side and is mounted substantially horizontally
 - 6 within the housing and rotatable about an axis,
 - 7 wherein the dispenser uses a retractable gauge step adaptable to vend products of
 - 8 various sizes;
 - 9 a product chute for receiving products when dispensed by the dispenser; and
 - 10 a motor coupled to the dispenser for rotating the dispenser.
- 1 2. The vending machine according to claim 1, wherein the retractable gauge step is
2 substantially permanently affixed to the product dispensing assembly.
- 1 3. The vending machine according to claim 2, wherein the retractable gauge step
2 adaptable to being in a first position where the gauge step is extended to create a gauge step to
3 support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly.
- 1 4. The vending machine according to claim 3, wherein the retractable gauge step is
2 adaptable to being in a second position where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step
3 does not support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1 5. The vending machine according to claim 4, wherein the retractable gauge step is
2 operable to slide from a first position where the gauge step is extended to create a gauge step to
3 support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly to a second position where the gauge
4 step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the product resting in the product
5 dispensing assembly.

1 6. The vending machine according to claim 5, wherein the retractable gauge step
2 comprises a plurality of detents operable to hold the gauge step in the first position.

1 7. The vending machine according to claim 6, wherein the retractable gauge step
2 comprises a plurality of detents operable to hold the gauge step in the second position.

1 8. The vending machine according to claim 7, wherein the product dispensing assembly
2 has a plurality of cutout slots and the retractable gauge step has a plurality of hooks, wherein the
3 cutout slots and the hooks are coupled such that the gauge step and the dispensing assembly are
4 substantially permanently affixed to each other.

1 9. The vending machine according to claim 8, wherein the retractable gauge step is
2 further adaptable to being in a plurality of positions where the gauge step is extended to create a
3 plurality of gauge steps to support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1 10. The vending machine according to claim 9, wherein the retractable gauge step is
2 further adaptable to being in a plurality of positions where the gauge step is retracted such that the
3 gauge step does not support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1 11. The vending machine according to claim 10, wherein the retractable gauge step is
2 operable to slide from a plurality of positions where the gauge step is extended to create a plurality
3 of gauge steps to support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly to a plurality of
4 positions where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the products
5 resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1 12. A method for dispensing products from a vending machine, comprising the steps of:
2 storing products in a product dispensing assembly;
3 employing a retractable gauge step for supporting products stored in the product
4 dispensing assembly; wherein the retractable gauge step is adaptable to dispense products of various
5 sizes; and
6 dispensing products from the dispensing assembly in a sequential manner.

1 13. The method according to claim 12, wherein the retractable gauge step is substantially
2 permanently affixed to the product dispensing assembly.

1 14. The method according to claim 13, wherein the retractable gauge step adaptable to
2 being in a first position where the gauge step is extended to create a gauge step to support the
3 product resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1 15. The method according to claim 14, wherein the retractable gauge step is adaptable
2 to being in a second position where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not
3 support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1 16. The method according to claim 15, wherein the retractable gauge step is operable to
2 slide from a first position where the gauge step is extended to create a gauge step to support the
3 product resting in the product dispensing assembly to a second position where the gauge step is
4 retracted such that the gauge step does not support the product resting in the product dispensing
5 assembly.

1 17. The method according to claim 16, wherein the retractable gauge step comprises a
2 plurality of detents operable to hold the gauge step in the first position.

1 18. The method according to claim 17, wherein the retractable gauge step comprises a
2 plurality of detents operable to hold the gauge step in the second position.

1 19. The method according to claim 18, wherein the product dispensing assembly has a
2 plurality of cutout slots and the retractable gauge step has a plurality of hooks, wherein the cutout
3 slots and the hooks are coupled such that the gauge step and the dispensing assembly are
4 substantially permanently affixed to each other.

1 20. The method according to claim 19, wherein the retractable gauge step is further
2 adaptable to being in a plurality of positions where the gauge step is extended to create a plurality
3 of gauge steps to support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1 21. The method according to claim 20, wherein the retractable gauge step is further
2 adaptable to being in a plurality of positions where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge
3 step does not support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1 22. The method according to claim 21, wherein the retractable gauge step is operable to
2 slide from a plurality of positions where the gauge step is extended to create a plurality of gauge
3 steps to support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly to a plurality of positions
4 where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the products resting in
5 the product dispensing assembly.